

**DECISION NOTICE**  
and  
**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**  
For the  
**Gold Project**

USDA Forest Service, Tahoe National Forest  
Yuba River Ranger District  
Sierra County, California

**DECISION AND REASONS FOR THE DECISION**

I have read the Gold Project Environmental Assessment (EA), reviewed the analysis in the project file, including documents incorporated by reference (listed on page 139 of the EA), and fully understand the environmental effects disclosed therein. After careful consideration of the analysis, applicable laws, the Forest Plan, and public comments, I have selected Alternative A (as modified by dropping .3 miles of decommissioning from the project proposal – see attached appendix). My conclusion is based on a review of the record that shows a thorough analysis using the best available science. Alternative A is fully described in the EA on pages 8-18 and 22-25. Alternative A will underburn approximately 673 acres, masticate approximately 67 acres, treat (restore) approximately 22 acres of Aspen, hand thin/hand pile/burn approximately 65 acres, hand thin/tractor pile/burn approximately 621 acres, mechanically thin approximately 777 acres, precommercially thin approximately 42 acres, and plant approximately 133 acres. Canopy cover on mechanically thinned acres would not fall below 40 percent in any unit. Conifers that are over 29.9 inches dbh would not be thinned (excluding aspen stands and hazard trees. Additional actions include treating smaller diameter materials (less than 10 inches dbh) on approximately 795 acres, Aspen Stand restoration on approximately 22 acres, reconstruct approximately 1 mile of roads, improve/create cover piles and log structures for wildlife habitat on approximately 240 acres, enhancement of hardwoods, offering sawtimber and biomass material for removal, removing hazardous trees along maintenance level 3, 4, and 5 Forest Service system roads, and within or immediately adjacent to high-use recreational and administrative sites, and decommissioning approximately 4.8 miles of roads (down .3 miles from 5.1 miles by dropping from proposed decommissioning list, Road 93-7-4: see comment letter from SPI, in attached appendix). These additional actions are funding dependent. Standard management requirements included in Alternative A to reduce and avoid adverse impacts are described in the EA, Chapter 2, pages 32-40, Management Requirements Common to All Alternatives, and in the Best Management Practices (BMPs), described in the EA, Chapter 2, pages 40-50.

My reasons for selecting Alternative A are:

- 1) Alternative A would achieve the project Purpose and Need described on pages 4-8 in the EA in the most responsible and effective manner, especially when compared to the Alternative B, the No Action alternative.
  
- 2) Alternative A improves forest health better than Alternatives B or C, with more acres of hardwood enhancement, and more effective large tree enhancement.

3) Specifically, Alternative A would help to promote structural diversity in tree sizes, age and species distribution better than Alternative C. Alternative A would also meet stand density objectives for a longer period of time than either Alternatives B or C.

4) Alternative A implements the Tahoe National Forests standards and guides as amended by the Supplemental SNFPA ROD (2004), the management requirements and Best Management Practices (BMPs) as presented in the EA (Chapter 2, pages 32-50, Management Requirements Common to All Alternatives, and Appendix C, Watershed Data- BMPs), and ensures potentially adverse effects are mitigated.

5) Alternative A provides for protection of forest resources, including Management Indicator Species, Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive species and their habitat; water quality; cultural and historical resources; and riparian areas.

6) Alternative A contributes to the long-term goal of reducing the amount of hazardous fuels through reduced mortality and improving the overall health and vigor in overcrowded stands by lessening competition-induced mortality over a longer period of time than either Alternatives B or C.

7) Alternative A best addresses the requirement in NEPA to consider “the degree to which the action may adversely affect” a given resource. I have considered the degree to which this project’s actions add cumulative effects to the various resources. I believe that the Management Requirements that are included in the Proposed Action reduce effects from this project to a level of non-significance for all affected resources, while still accomplishing the purpose and need for the project.

8) Alternative A ensures hazardous fuels are reduced, provides buffers between developed areas and wildland, increases the efficiency of firefighting efforts and reduce risks to firefighters, the public, facilities and structures, and natural resources. The majority of treatments are within the Urban Wildland Intermix Zone (Defense and Threat).

9) Alternative A better creates variability in stand structure in a number of ways through the selection of leave trees, thinning around black oak, large tree enhancement, creating ¼ acre gaps in conifer stands, and leaving buffers along streams.

10) Alternative A provides the greater benefits to achieving the structural attributes most needed by wildlife associated with late-successional forests by providing a greater number of choices in selecting trees to be removed to meet desirable structural goals, such as increasing species diversity, reducing competition with oaks and very large trees (greater than 30 inches dbh), reducing inter-tree competition, and developing horizontal and vertical structural diversity in forested stands.

11) Alternative A keeps future options for late successional forest management by retaining those attributes that are the most difficult to replace – retaining all trees greater than 30 inches dbh, retaining non-hazardous snags, retaining large downed logs, and retaining canopy cover of 40 percent or greater.

## ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Four alternatives were considered, **Alternative A**- *the Proposed Action (original scoping proposal, consistent with the revised Framework of 2004)*, **Alternative B** - *No Action*, **Alternative C** – *which follows and implements the 2001 Framework*, and **Alternative D** – *Non-commercial funding (Fuels reduction activities only)*.

## PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

On May 14, 2009, numerous scoping letters for the Gold Project were mailed to interested and potentially affected parties, and on that same day, a public notice was published in Grass Valley's *The Union* newspaper, as well as Downieville's *Mountain Messenger*. As a result of this public scoping, a total of 12 letters of comment were received. These comments were used to identify the issues and develop the alternatives included in this Environmental Assessment. The Gold Project was included in the Tahoe National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions dated April of 2009, and all subsequent issues. Once completed, the EA was mailed to those individuals or organizations that responded during scoping, contacted the District and requested a copy or otherwise indicated an interest in the Gold Project. Additionally, a notice of completion of the EA was published in *The Union* and *the Mountain Messenger* on September 30, 2010. Two letters were received which contained comments on the EA. I considered and responded to these comments, which are attached as an appendix to this decision.

Notification of this decision will appear in the Nevada City/Grass Valley, California newspaper, *The Union*, as well as Downieville's *Mountain Messenger*, and will be distributed to those who commented on the EA.

## FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

I have determined that this action will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not needed. This determination is based on the effects analysis documented in the Project EA, and considers the following factors listed in 40 CFR 1508.27:

**(a) Context** -- This project would not pose significant effects either in a local context or in the broader context of the Tahoe National Forest (EA discussion on pg 60).

### **(b) Intensity**

**(1) Beneficial and adverse effects** – Benefits of this project were not used to offset adverse impacts, and adverse impacts of this project are not significant even when separated from its benefits (EA pp 61-110).

**(2) Public health and safety** -- Implementation of this project will not cause any significant effects relative to public health and safety (EA pg 110).

**(3) Unique characteristics of the geographic area** -- This project would not have any significant effects on unique characteristics of the geographic area (EA pp 110-111).

**(4) Controversy** – Public involvement has not identified any legitimate scientific controversy regarding the effects of this project (EA pg 111).

**(5) Uncertainty, unique or unknown risks** -- Effects of implementing the selected alternative are not highly uncertain, nor do they represent unique or unknown risks (EA pg 111).

**(6) Precedence** – This action does not establish a precedent for future actions or represent a decision about future management considerations (EA pg 112).

**(7) Cumulative impacts** --This action would not cause any significant, cumulative, environmental impacts (EA pp 112-130).

**(8) Cultural and historical resources** -- This action would not pose any significant adverse effects on cultural or historical resources (EA pg 131).

**(9) Endangered or threatened species or its habitat** – The selected alternative would not affect any federally threatened or endangered species or their designated critical habitat. The selected alternative will not cause a trend toward Federal listing or a loss of viability for any R5 Sensitive Species (EA pg 131).

**(10) Federal, State, or local law or requirements** -- The selected alternative conforms to all applicable Federal, State, and local laws and requirements (EA pp 131-135).

## **Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations**

I find that all actions included in Alternative A are consistent with direction in the *Tahoe National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan* as amended by the *Supplemental Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment* Record of Decision (ROD). All actions meet *National Forest Management Act (NFMA)* requirements detailed in 36 CFR 219.27 (EA pp 131-134).

The project is in full compliance with the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act and the National Historic Preservation Act.

## **Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities**

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to the regulations in 36 CFR §215. Individuals or organizations who submitted comments or otherwise expressed interest in the project during the comment period specified at §215.6 may appeal this decision. Appeals must be filed within 45 days following the date of the published legal notice of this decision in Grass Valley's *The Union* newspaper. The publication date of the legal notice in *The Union* is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal (§215.15 (a)), and those wishing to appeal should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. Notices of appeal must meet the requirements in 36 CFR §215.14. A statement of appeal, including attachments, must be filed (regular mail, fax, e-mail, hand-delivery, express delivery, or messenger service) with the Appeal Deciding Officer, Randy Moore, Regional Forester, 1323 Club Drive, Vallejo, California, 94592. The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered appeals are 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Electronic appeals must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc) to [appeals-pacificsouthwest-regional-office@fs.fed.us](mailto:appeals-pacificsouthwest-regional-office@fs.fed.us). In cases where no identifiable name is attached to an electronic message, a verification of identity will be required. A scanned signature is one way to provide verification.

If no appeals are filed within the 45-day time period, implementation of the decision may begin on, but not before, the 5th business day following the close of the appeal-filing period (36 CFR §215.15). When an appeal is filed, implementation may occur on, but not before, the 15th business day following the date of appeal disposition (36 CFR §215.2). In the event of multiple appeals, the implementation date is controlled by the date of the last appeal disposition.

A copy of the Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact is available upon request from the Yuba River Ranger District.

### **Contact Person**

For further information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact: Dennis Stevens, Environmental Coordinator, Yuba River Ranger District, 15924 Highway 49, Camptonville, CA 95922, phone (530) 478-6253.

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Tom Quinn – Forest Supervisor  
Deciding Officer, Tahoe National Forest

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Date

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